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ICC APPROVES INDEPENDENT AUDIT OF EDISON POWER OUTAGES

The Illinois Commerce Commission Thursday authorized an independent investigation into Commonwealth Edison Company's electric distribution system following power outages this summer that left thousands of customers in the Chicago area without power.

Commission Chairman Ed Hurley said he was concerned with the number of substation fires this year and that Edison had not yet determined the root cause of the fires.

"It's time we find out if this is a design problem that could lead to future problems in other substations," Hurley said. "Businesses and ratepayers have suffered as a result of these outages and I think we need some answers."

The Commission directed staff to contract with Liberty Consulting Group of Quentín, Pennsylvania to conduct the investigation, which will examine the circumstances and determine the cause of a Downers Grove substation fire and outage that began on August 10 and if there is any relation to recent outages or equipment failures at Edison's Fisk and Sawyer substations in Chicago in June.

The company will attempt to determine if other Edison substations are designed, constructed, maintained or operated in the same way as the Downers Grove substation and if those substations may be vulnerable to similar failures.

Commissioner Kevin Wright, chairman of the ICC's Electric Policy Committee, said the investigation should focus, too, on whether the utility's power delivery system is at risk for widespread or extended customer outages due to insufficient switching capability when a substation is lost.

"The General Assembly has charged us with ensuring that utilities deliver reliable service. This audit does not presume wrongdoing by Commonwealth Edison, but I think we have a responsibility to do what we can to protect these customers in the future," Wright said.

Liberty Consulting was hired by the Commission in 1999 to perform audits of the Edison transmission and distribution system looking specifically at the company's planning and maintenance practices in the 1990's, after a series of power failures in the summer of 1999 and 2000. The company provided follow up between 2001 and 2004 on Edison's efforts to address recommendations stemming from the 1999 and 2000 outages

and equipment failures. Those reports are available on the Commission's website at icc.illinois.gov.

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